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# THE HERPICH AFFAIR OF 1924

## *Modern Architecture Challenging the Economic Establishment*

In 1923, Erich Mendelsohn was by far the most successful among the young German architects, having already realized many important buildings: the Einstein tower, the Steinberg-Herrmann Hat Factory, the renewal of the Mosse Publisher Building. Between 1923 and 1924 he developed the plan for the renewal and expansion of the building for the Herpich Furriers on Leipziger Strasse, which was the most important commercial street in Berlin. The entangled history of the project approval and realization testifies to a crucial moment for the affirmation of modern architecture.

Unfortunately, the official documentation about the Herpich store, including even the building itself, has been lost.<sup>1</sup> The first known date regarding this project is revealed in Mendelsohn's private correspondence to his wife on 7 April 1924. On this day, the Sachverständigenausschuss, an advisory board within the Berlin building authority, which had to verify compliance of the project with the new communal act against townscape damage, approved the plan by a wide majority, thirteen votes against three. That dates the project commission back towards the end of 1923 or the beginning of 1924. These temporal terms are significant

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1 For a detailed description of the building and the construction phases, see Stephan R., *Studien zu Waren und Geschäftshäuser Erich Mendelsohns in Deutschland* (Munich: Tuduv, 1992), pp. 73–82.

because they date the start of the plan by the patrons to a new phase of German history, i.e. the beginning of the economic recovery as a result of the monetary reform, which ended the hyperinflation period in November 1923. Still, at the end of September 1923, for example, the cost of living index had been calculated at 28 million Marks by the Statistisches Reichsamts. After seven weeks, by 19 November 1923, nearly on the eve of the new monetary course, it had risen up to 831 million Marks. Another important factor is the fact that the old head of the Herpich Family, Paul Herpich, had just died in the summer of 1923: thus, it was the advocates of a new generation that enlists Mendelsohn to plan the expansion and renewal of the company building. The plan consisted of the unification of two existing building units on the Leipziger Strasse, of which one was the historical seat of C. A. Herpich & Sons (Leipziger Strasse 9/10), with the latter on Leipziger Strasse 11 being an annex. The existing buildings were nineteenth-century houses, characterized by historic facades with traditional bow windows, as in typical Berlin residential buildings. The project consisted of a new unified facade for the two buildings and a two-storey addition to obtain more useful commercial space.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the approval by the advisory board, the then temporary building authority head, who was the Berlin mayor himself, Gustav Böß, returned the plan back to the board for a new examination of the entire matter, refusing the conclusive release. After the ensuing approval, the plan still continued to remain blocked, a fact that pushed Mendelsohn to orchestrate a press campaign, involving his progressive colleagues inside the BDA, Union of German Architects, the most renowned German architectural association, of which he was already a member. He managed to create an internal committee of 12 BDA members, called the “Zwölfer-Ausschuss” (Committee of Twelve), to monitor the correctness of the activity of the communal building authority regarding the procedure for building applications. After a few months, the “Zehnerring” (Circle of Ten) developed from this committee of twelve architects, the aim of which was to represent the modernist architects currently in Berlin.<sup>3</sup>

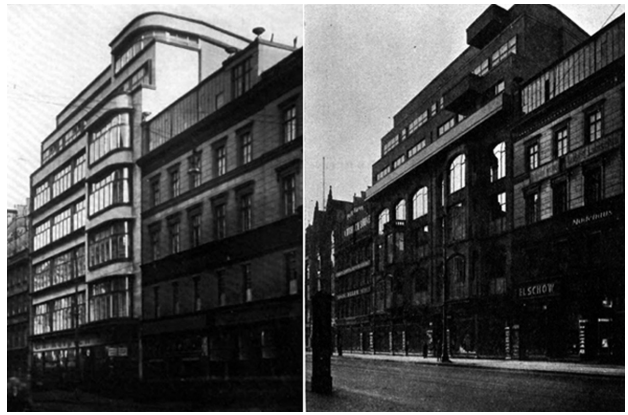
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2 A picture of the existing buildings was published by Werner Hegemann inside an article about the controversy over the new façade. See W[erner] H[egemann]: “Eine wichtige Berliner Stadtbaufrage: Erich Mendelsohns Herpich-Umbau in der Leipziger Strasse,” *Städtebau* 20 (1925), pp. 156–157.

3 The foundation of this architects committee will be discussed later in this paper (see note 19). About Mendelsohn and the “Ring,” see also Stephan R.: “‘Man kämpft mühsam um Centimeter, wo die Reaktion Meter besetzt hat.’ Mendelsohns Mitwirken im Arbeitsrat für Kunst, in der Novembergruppe und im Ring,” in *Erich Mendelsohn. Architekt 1887–1953. Gebaute Welten*, ed. R. Stephan (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 1998), pp. 69–71.

*Fig. 1: Left: Erich Mendelsohn, C. A. Herpich Sons, Furriers, Berlin, view of the old store after facade refurbishment, 1927.*

*Right: Erich Mendelsohn, C. A. Herpich Sons, Furriers, Berlin, view of the old store with storey addition before facade refurbishment, 1926.*



The practical result of this public protest was the permission to start the building, although only the interior remodelling and the addition of the storey of the older Herpich store were allowed, with the result that the building exterior remained incomplete. The business activity was thus operating perfectly by 1926, when the new Stadtbaurat of Berlin, Martin Wagner, close to the modernist architects, removed all obstacles to the building's completion, which was eventually carried out in 1928 (fig. 1).

From the press campaign emerges the image of a rather personal style of building management of the city by mayor Böß, aided by the former and very recently retired Stadtbaurat Ludwig Hoffmann, who then was appointed as head of the advisory board. But behind the issue of architectonic taste, an easy target for a press-campaign, it seemed like a city planning management problem of the city, in particular regarding the economic development of new trade forms, relating to the transformations of the cityscape. As examples of unjustified refusals to give building permissions, the BDA architects' protest points to—beyond Mendelsohn's project—the high-rise building near the Friedrichstrasse railway station and a new department store on the Rolandufer.<sup>4</sup>

What could have been the interest in hindering these plans?

One curious coincidence of protagonists connects the Herpich case to the later plan of the *Galeries Lafayette* at Potsdamer Platz in 1928, as the Herpich building was finished. The *Galeries Lafayette*, later created by Mendelsohn as a simple office building, the *Columbushaus*, would have been located on a prominent site as

4 On 8 May 1924, the following newspapers (with the respective columnist in brackets) reported on the controversy surrounding the Herpich building and the protest promoted by the BDA upon Mendelsohn's request: *Berliner Tageblatt* (Fritz Stahl), *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* (Walter Curt Behrendt), *Vossische Zeitung* (Max Osborn), *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* (Willy Ganske), *Vorwärts* (Fritz Hellwag). The press campaign was reported also on the magazines *Der Neubau* (Walter Curt Behrendt), *Das Kunstblatt* (Paul Westheim) and *Bauwelt* (Friedrich Paulsen) during May 1924. These articles were followed some months later by Werner Hegemann's contribution in *Städtebau* (see also note 2).

a direct and dangerous competitor to the largest department store of Berlin, the Wertheim department store on Leipziger Strasse/Leipziger Platz.<sup>5</sup> From the testimony of mayor Böß with respect to the Sklarek scandal, which abruptly ended his political career after 1929, it turns out that Georg Wertheim, the head of Wertheim store chain protested against the city government for it would have favoured the acquisition of the plot of land by the competing company near his own department store. When shortly later the same Wertheim became involved in the Lafayette planning to change the establishment of a department store into an office block, Mendelsohn himself wrote to his wife that he was not afraid of the presence of Wertheim, although the latter did not yet know that Mendelsohn would have been the architect.<sup>6</sup>

As for the above mentioned Lafayette plan and the controversy surrounding the new Herpich building, there are strong indications (though no documentary proof) that Wertheim took an interest in fostering mayor Böß's commitment to stop the new building. Firstly, Ludwig Hoffmann himself, who played an important role in the affair, was Georg Wertheim's personal consultant for architectural issues at the time. Secondly, in those same years the last expansion of the Wertheim store on Leipziger Platz was being planned and realized between 1924 and 1925. It was quite obvious that Wertheim's desire to hinder the dangerous expansion of a nearby competitor influenced Böß's attempt to stop the building.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, it is plausible that a simple specialized retail store such C. A. Herpich & Sons could be a strong competitor to the gigantic *Wertheim* store chain.

In German economic history, from the Gründerzeit (1870–1885) onwards, the distinction between a *Kaufhaus* (a retail store, but often a manufacturing and retail store) and a *Warenhaus* (a department store) sanctioned in the Prussian act for the taxation of the department stores considered the variety of ware classes rather than the dimension of the business volume. Moreover, many textile manufacturing and retail companies—like the C. A. Herpich & Sons, which has specialized in the branch of the fur clothes—had a larger business volume than the first

5 See Ladwig-Winters S.: *Wertheim – Ein Warenhausunternehmen und seine Eigentümer* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 1997), pp. 83–84.

6 Letter from Erich Mendelsohn to Luise Mendelsohn, 22 July 22, 1928, Kunstbibliothek Berlin, Mendelsohn Archiv, Briefe 44, translated and published in Mendelsohn E.: *Letters of an Architect*, ed. O. Beyer (London: Abellard-Schumann, 1967), p. 100. The mention of Georg Wertheim has been cut out from the published version.

7 See Fischer E. and Ladwig-Winters S.: *Die Wertheims. Geschichte einer Familie* (Berlin: Rowohlt Verlag, 2004), p. 182 ff.

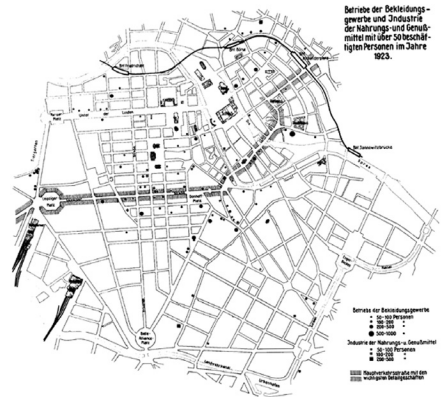


Fig. 2: Survey of textile manufacturing & retail companies in Berlin, 1923. C. A. Herpich Sons is the nearest black point to the Leipziger Platz on the south side of the Leipziger Strasse.

pioneering warehouses chains<sup>8</sup> (fig. 2). From the data of the 1909 study on the department stores phenomenon by Julius Hirsch, it appears clearly that the business volume related to this ware class created more than half of the income of this new retail system.

Contrary to the other great department store chains like Karstadt, Hermann Tietz and Leonhard Tietz, the Wertheim chain had structured its own business by centralizing its presence in the German capital city, after an initial foundation phase in the provinces. This centralization of the chain distinguished Wertheim as an exception within the phenomenon of the department store growth in Germany, which, with a time delay of approximately 25 to 30 years compared to the corresponding French phenomenon, had also asserted itself primarily through a net system that reflected the German administrative situation after the unification of 1870. In contrast, in France the department store grew on the principle of the centralization in only one company premises in Paris that operated over long distances through a mail-order selling system, thus reflecting the absolute supremacy of the French capital city. Wertheim had reproduced somehow within the city limits of Berlin the process that its competing chains had developed in various parts of the German state.

The Wertheim department store on Leipziger Strasse built in 1893/95 by Alfred Messel had gained almost immediately the business volume of all the previous Wertheim stores on Rosenthaler Strasse and Oranienstrasse/Moritzplatz, and shortly later doubled their income. Another interesting point regarding the Wertheim warehouse on Leipziger Strasse was the fact that it was the only department store which had gained a significant market share among high-class consumers, whereas the other chain stores and even the competing chains maintained a more “popular” character as retail department stores. This development

8 See Homburg H.: “Warenhausunternehmen und ihre Gründer in Frankreich und Deutschland oder: eine diskrete Elite und mancherlei Mythen,” *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 1992/1, pp. 183–219.

resulted from localization: Leipziger Strasse was not only the main market street in Berlin from the end of nineteenth century onwards, but also the centre of the most valuable market, that of textile and dress manufacturing. C. A. Herpich & Sons was part of this market field and already around 1880 figured among the greatest dress manufacturing companies in Berlin.<sup>9</sup> A testament to its solidity and reputation is the fact that in the war period C. A. Herpich & Sons was among the retail stores, like the department stores chains, issuing emergency money. Lacking specific documentations and studies, it can however be observed that the Herpich business policy during the Twenties appears rather modern and remarkably aggressive. For example, its advertising in newspapers shows a graphical modernization equal to that of the great chains, but linked to a greater versatility to attract the consumer public with a dynamic system of vignettes which matched the standardized brand sign and the description of the wares to be advertised, changing just like a narrative sequence in the different newspaper issues.

Moreover the architectonic aspects of Mendelsohn's plan for Herpich were extremely innovative. "The merchandise comes first. Every architectonic means serve to appreciate it," was the leading concept later used by the architect in a theoretical lecture on retail store design that recalled his aims in commercial architecture.<sup>10</sup> These aims are already recognizable in the design for C. A. Herpich & Sons. The building's exterior appearance suggested an image of dynamic through his horizontal emphasized design, which hosted a functional night lighting system that underlined the building lines, thus becoming a strong advertising element. The facade treatment distinguished clearly between the completely open ground floor as a big shop-window and the upper storey, where the glass windows went up to the ceiling to allow a light to diffuse to the benches for the wares. The interior design had an "objective" treatment, abandoning the typical dreamland character of the already established department stores. This feature prefigured already in the future developments of commercial architecture that Mendelsohn would later realize in his projects for the Schocken department stores.<sup>11</sup> Thus, these innova-

9 See Biggeleben C.: *Das "Bollwerk des Bürgertums": die Berliner Kaufmannschaft 1870-1920* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2006).

10 Mendelsohn E.: "Das neuzeitliche Geschäftshaus," unpublished lecture ms., undated (ca. 1926-1929), Kunstbibliothek Berlin, Mendelsohn Archiv, M. V 32. Excerpts published in Mendelsohn E.: *Gedankenwelten. Unbekannte Texte zu Architektur, Kulturgeschichte und Politik*, ed. I. Heinze-Greenberg, and R. Stephan (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2000).

11 For a broader interpretation of Mendelsohn's department store architecture, see James K.: *Erich Mendelsohn and the Architecture of German Modernism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1997).



tions presented C. A. Herpich & Sons as a modern company in the commercial field that was expressly oriented to the upper-middle class consumer public. Paradoxically, a company which around 1880 was already part of the economic establishment in Berlin, which at the time was being shockingly undermined by the new force of the wholesale stores, presented itself now as a leading commercial enterprise through a modernist look in opposition to the cathedrals of commerce, the already established department stores. More evidence of this commercial offensive is the second project that Mendelsohn undertook for C. A. Herpich & Sons, realized in 1928. That was the renewal of a shop for luxury male dress retail. From the architectural point of view, the elements discussed above are by now definitely matured in a whole coherent design, but above all the location had a strategic meaning. The store was placed at the corner of the block on the opposite side of Leipziger Strasse, thus marking the crossing between Leipziger Strasse and Wilhelmstrasse as a “Herpich’s corner”. Moreover, on the opposite side of Wilhelmstrasse the block was occupied by the Wertheim department store: it was metaphorically a commercial attack at the heart of the adversary territories.

If the troublesome history of the Herpich project appears therefore to be influenced, by means of politics, by the combative strategies of the commercial companies in Berlin after the post-war crisis, the protest orchestrated by Mendelsohn shows how the young modernists attempted to assert their role as agents of economic growth, thus showing the actual potentiality of modernist architecture within the city as an economic booster in the new mass society. Mayor Böß had tried to justify his unlawful misleading of the building authority as a result of the necessity to wait for a new communal building regulation, before allowing a new kind of building. Significantly, the BDA’s response to that weak justification was closed with the consideration that such a situation “meant that also that year the building exercise would be finished with serious damage for the architects but above all for the building industry.” The same issue of the magazine *Die Bauwelt* that carried this second protest note on 22 May 1924 added the report of a similar protest movement in Hamburg.<sup>12</sup>

The dealings in the Herpich affair were even political—because of the legislative changes and their influence on the building industry—as shown by the meeting called by Mendelsohn at the Prussian Ministry for the People’s Welfare

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12 “Die hemmenden Kunstbeiräte,” *Bauwelt* 15 (1924), p. 456. The article is the quotation of the counter reply that the B.D.A. made in response to the official reply to the BDA letter of protest against the activity of the Sachverständigenausschuss (see also note 4). It is followed by a shorter note (“Bauhemmnungen auch in Hamburg”) about similar cases occurred in Hamburg.



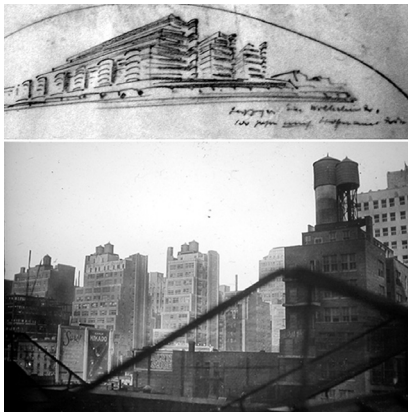


Fig. 3: Top: Erich Mendelsohn, sketch for a futuristic urban development on Wilhelmstrasse, Berlin “100 Years after Hoffmann’s Death,” (ca. 1925).

Bottom: View from a terrace of the Pennsylvania Hotel, New York, 1924.

(Ministerium für Volkswohlfahrt). He met two high public servants, ministry councillor Friedrich and ministry director Conze, the highest-ranking aide to the Minister Heinrich Hirtsiefer.<sup>13</sup> Conze guided the whole procedure for the preparation of the Prussian urban planning act, whose contents affected all the themes that Mendelsohn’s Herpich project typically addressed. The opinion of the professionals was decisive for the definition of many technical passages of the law, which had a clear influence on architecture. The encounter was decisive for approving the Herpich project, although with more delay. It is possible that some of the more interesting Mendelsohn sketches related to the Herpich building were drawn with this talk in mind, to illustrate and contest some aspects used to justify the blocking of the approval. In particular, one sketch shows the utopian building development of an urban block with the Herpich project as drawn “100 Years After Hoffmann’s Death.” Here are illustrated the building possibilities based on a system of building alignment and on the application of zoning, then debated to theoretical level and that would have been one of the innovative and controversial points of the Prussian urban planning act. Moreover, Mendelsohn inserted shortly later in his photo book *Amerika: Bilderbuch eines Architekten*—which was published before the completion of the Herpich building as propaganda for Mendelsohn’s ideas—a view of Manhattan resembling the urban development idea of this sketch<sup>14</sup> (fig. 3).

The second controversial issue concerned the horizontal facade composition, which Mendelsohn justified with considerations about visual perception and sensory stimulation, borrowed probably from Georg Simmel’s studies on spiritual life in the metropolis. In January 1925, Mendelsohn obtained directly from Conze the assurance that the ministry “had the paragraph about the modification of the

<sup>13</sup> See Stephan R. (as on note 1), p. 75.

<sup>14</sup> See Mendelsohn E.: *Amerika. Bilderbuch eines Architekten* (Berlin: Rudolf Mosse Verlag, 1925), plate 76.

Fig. 4: Left: Ely J. Kahn,  
Zimmermann Saxe and  
Zimmerman Associated,  
New York (built 1919),  
1924.

Right: Erich Mendelsohn,  
C. A. Herpich Sons, Furri-  
ers, Berlin, view by night,  
ca. 1927.



light on the facade, eliminated from the building permission file.”<sup>15</sup> This clause was obviously related to the possibility of integrating advertising in the architectural design of the building. Mendelsohn had found dramatic confirmations about this architectural theme during his study journey in America between October and November 1924. It is possible that, taking advantage of the long and repeated course of building approval, Mendelsohn introduced some facade modifications on the basis of his travel experiences, in particular for the solution of the advertising lighting system of the facade that strictly resembled the example of Ely Jacques Kahn’s Zimmermann, Saxe & Zimmermann Ass. Building, which Mendelsohn also showed in the photo book *Amerika* as a perfect example of this architectural issue<sup>16</sup> (fig. 4).

In July 1926 the *Berliner Tageblatt* published a curious article about a legal controversy between the city government of Berlin and a private company, referred to only by the capital letter “H.” The trial was about the taxation of a particular light advertisement on the public street: the company eventually won the civil suit.<sup>17</sup> It is not possible to recognize with absolute certainty C. A. Herpich & Sons as the opponent in this trial; however at that time the provisional facade arrangement, maintaining the original eclectic design of the old house, also showed a cantilevered structure that strictly resembled the later night-lighting system of the finished building and perhaps was used in the same manner. At any rate, this article appears in the press survey of the Ministry for the People’s Welfare among the materials for the inquiry revision for the urban planning act drawing, with the note that it was to be directly acknowledged by minister Hirtsiefer himself.<sup>18</sup>

15 Letter from Erich Mendelsohn to Luise Mendelsohn, 10 February 10, 1925, Kunstbibliothek Berlin, Mendelsohn Archiv, Briefe 41. See also note 13.

16 See Mendelsohn E. (as on note 15), plate 25.

17 Dr. Marcus J.: “Die Luft darf nicht besteuert werden,” *Berliner Tageblatt*, 17 July 1926, n. 333 (Morgenausgabe).

18 See “Städtebaugesetz: Sammlung von Zeitungsausschnitten 1926–1927,” Geheimes Staatsarchiv Berlin, I. HA Rep. 191 VWM, 100.

This shows that the new advertising methods were an economic and architectonic feature affected by the new general building regulations and indeed that the point of view of the architects, through their category association, assumed decisive importance during the legislative process. Among the architects, the modernist ones won an increasing weight, as far as regards the same press survey, other public interventions by the BDA and by the “Ring,” which had meanwhile been founded as independent national association out of the Zehnerring in late 1925. If Mendelsohn’s professional success had been the main instrument to gain political weight within the BDA, the cultural issue was equally decisive in defining the rows of the modernist architects and their aims to represent the architectural side of the German progressive forces in post-war years. In the same first assembly of the newly born Zwölfer-Ausschuss within the BDA, Mendelsohn autonomously proposed to also support the Bauhaus position in the struggle against the rightist conservative parties in Thüringen, as he promptly informed Gropius the following day, 14 May 1924:

*Regarding your struggle, I have yesterday proposed during the meeting of the Zwölfer-Ausschuss, which creation you may have already heard of, that the entire BDA should support you. Please, forward the official request per letter to the BDA, and a copy of the request to me. I suggest that you participate directly at the next meeting in order to explain the matter. We all will come to the same opinion and support your protest.<sup>19</sup>*

Notably, even the attack against the Bauhaus had a mixed cultural political and economic basis, because at this point the attack on the school undermined the foundation of a private company, which would have allowed the Bauhaus to form a more solid connection with industry to manufacture the products of its workshop experiments. Mendelsohn succeeded even in gaining the support of the BDA in both causes, thus combining his own professional one with that of Bauhaus’s survival.

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19 Letter from Erich Mendelsohn to Walter Gropius, 15 May 1924, Bauhaus Archiv Berlin, GN 1/162 Papers II (552). The correspondence between Mendelsohn and Gropius about the support to the Bauhaus went on up to a thanksgiving reply from Gropius on 30 June 1924. It appears clear that the Zehnerring was not been established yet, but Mendelsohn mentioned to have reported about the matter to other six members of the BDA Vorstand, which was the main council of the association. The architects mentioned (Mies van der Rohe, Schilbach, Nachlicht, Ahrens, and the Luckhardt Brothers) were not members of the Zwölfer-Ausschuss [Bauhaus Archiv Berlin, GN 1/160 Papers II (552)]. It was probably the positive result of this supportive action for the Bauhaus that lead, in the later months, to the formation of the Zehnerring. See also note 3.

This allegiance continued. In January 1925, Gropius made a friendly request to Mendelsohn again to help the Bauhaus, this time through the newly founded Zehnerring, against the recent press attack by Heinrich de Fries, who edited *Die Baugilde*, the official magazine of the BDA.<sup>20</sup> Fries had personal rather than cultural reasons for his attack against the Bauhaus school, and particularly against Gropius. As Mendelsohn wrote to Lyonel Feininger, it was “mostly a matter of men than of things.”<sup>21</sup> The moment was critical, because the Bauhaus was then in the midst of its transfer to Dessau and the school’s adversaries were using this new controversy to hurt the Bauhaus public image, presenting Fries’s judgements as representative of opinion overall at the BDA. Once again, the aim of the reactionary forces was to prevent the establishment of the Bauhaus in a new political environment, which could have lead to the Bauhaus success in reforming the industrial production, although Mendelsohn himself had personal questions about the educational programs carried out at the school in Weimar. He wrote about this to Moholy-Nagy, who had regularly contacted Mendelsohn on Gropius’s behalf from February until March of 1925:

*Finally, it will not be unknown to you that the Bauhaus in its past composition and activity did not remain without problems for all of us, even if we will always naturally intervene on the Bauhaus’s behalf, against which the opposing side has so much fought. I am writing this to you as my personal opinion, although I am sure that the opinion of the other Zehnerring members does not deviate substantially from it.*

Adding a remark, which compared his personal battle in Berlin to that of the Bauhaus, he concluded: “Do not let yourself be distracted; you must act. There have been smaller matters here, for which we have already had to fight longer.”<sup>22</sup>

The reply of the Zehnerring was not immediately finalized, as the Bauhaus Meister themselves replied to Fries, receiving in return a harsher attack, which made unsuitable a protest letter already prepared by Bruno Taut.

20 de Fries H.: “Die Auflösung des staatlichen Bauhauses in Weimar und seine zukünftige Form,” *Baugilde* 7 (1925), pp. 77–79.

21 Letter from Erich Mendelsohn to Lyonel Feininger, 5 February 5, 1925, Bauhaus Archiv Berlin, GN 1/144 Papers II (552).

22 Letter from Erich Mendelsohn to László Moholy-Nagy, 23 March 1925, Bauhaus Archiv Berlin, GN 1/135 Papers II (552). In this letter Mendelsohn quotes also the support telegram from the Zehnerring architects. There are only reported nine signatures (Behrens, Bartning, Häring, Mies van der Rohe, Schilbach, Bruno Taut, Max Taut, Poelzig, and Mendelsohn).

However, Mendelsohn finally managed to send a support telegram signed by the Zehnerring architects to Dessau mayor Fritz Hesse after a solicitation by Gropius over the telephone. This message came just in time for supporting the decision of the City Council to establish the Bauhaus in Dessau. Mendelsohn's reply on 31 March 1925 to Gropius's letter of thanks for his aid clearly explains his idea of unifying the positions of modernist architects in a kind of pocket battleship to be operated among the public opinion makers: "If the Zehnerring should have contributed a little to it, then the necessity for such unity is again proven."<sup>23</sup>

The initial success of modernist architects in overcoming such challenges was not to last. The allegiance of modern architecture, progressive culture, and the new economy did not survive the consequences of the world economic crisis at the end of the 1920s.

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<sup>23</sup> Letter from Erich Mendelsohn to Walter Gropius, 31 March 31, 1925, Bauhaus Archiv Berlin, GN 1/134 Papers II (552).